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Waiting for a Bus? Time to Enjoy a Taste of Art

By Sophie Haigney

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Some samples of the work of Elle Pérez, whose photography will make 100 bus shelters into mini-museums this summer. Elle Pérez/47 Canal

This summer, 100 city bus shelters will be transformed into platforms for an exhibition of work by a New York-based photographer, Elle Pérez.

Pérez's "from sun to sun," which opens on Aug. 13, is the first exhibition in a collaboration between the nonprofit Public Art Fund and the advertising firm JCDecaux, which controls the ad space for about 3,400 bus shelters in New York City. The Public Art Fund will use this unconventional canvas to present two solo photography exhibitions annually; each exhibition will run for 14 weeks on 100 bus shelters.

Mx. Pérez, 29, has been photographing New York, and especially the Bronx, for years. Past work by Mx. Pérez, who uses the gender-neutral pronouns "they" and "them," has explored the punk community in the Bronx, underground night life culture, gender

identity and Latinx communities. (Latinx is a gender neutral alternative to Latino or Latina.) For “from sun to sun,” Mx. Pérez will shoot new work all over the city — mostly focused on portraiture, but also on revisiting locations that have personal significance. “I grew up all over the city,” Mx. Pérez said, recalling long rides on the No. 6 train from Lower Manhattan to the Bronx, “certain spots in Harlem” and the Puerto Rican neighborhood in Bushwick where they now live. “I’ve been hanging out in bus stops for research,” they said.

Katerina Stathopoulou, assistant curator at the Public Art Fund, said the broad reach of the exhibition was part of the goal. “We really want to reach all five boroughs,” she said. Ms. Stathopoulou said there are visual advantages to bus shelters-as-exhibition-spaces. “The work will be at street level, and at eye level,” she said. “When you look at something in a bus shelter, it’s often at life scale. Especially because in the first iterations of the series we’re primarily focusing on portraiture, to be able to look at a full-sized portrait eye-to-eye will be a really powerful experience.”

Mx. Pérez is also excited about the bus stop as a platform. “What’s really exciting to me about this project is the potential for having something on the street available and accessible to the people I grew up with and grew up around,” they said, noting that people might have extra time at bus stops. “When someone is sitting on a bench on the way to work, knowing the bus is coming, they may have to wait a long time,” Mx. Pérez said. “That may be time that they don’t actually spend with one image in museums and galleries, but while they’re waiting for the bus, they can.”